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ABSTRACT: This poster provides an overview of the development process of the SHEILA policy framework, which is a research product aimed to assist with the development of institutional learning analytics policies. The preliminary findings of our early research activities highlight prominent challenges that inhibit the adoption, scalability and sustainability of learning analytics among higher education institutions. This poster calls for a systematic approach to addressing challenges by presenting a research evidence-based policy framework.

Keywords: Learning analytics; policy; higher education

1 INTRODUCTION

The field of learning analytics (LA), with its associated methods of online student data analysis, is able to provide novel and real-time approaches to assessing critical issues such as student progression and retention. While the use of LA has gained much attention and has been/is being adopted by many higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe and the other parts of the world, the maturity of HEIs in terms of being ‘student data informed’ are only in the early stages. The literature has identified that the adoption of LA in complex educational systems requires a systematic approach to bringing about effective changes (Macfadyen, Dawson, Pardo, & Gašević, 2014). The EU-funded SHEILA project (<http://sheilaproject.eu>) aims to support HEIs in the development of institutional policies and strategies for LA by building a policy framework that is based on research evidence.

2 METHODS

The SHEILA policy framework, the main output of the SHEILA project, is being developed using the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) (Macfadyen et al., 2014), based on data collected from direct engagement with stakeholders using various research methods, including group concept mapping (with LA experts, n = 30), interviews (with senior managers, n = 64), surveys (institutional survey, n = 46; staff survey in 4 HEIs, and student survey (n=2821) in 5 HEIs), and focus groups (staff focus groups in 4 HEIs, and student focus groups in 4 HEIs).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Essential features of a LA policy

The group concept mapping activity identified six themes among 99 statements about essential features of a LA policy, including (1) privacy & transparency, (2) roles & responsibilities (of all stakeholders), (3) objectives of learning analytics (learner and teacher support), (4) risks & challenges, (5) data management, and (6) research & data analysis. The rating results of these statements show an obvious drop of rating scale in the '*ease of implementation*' level of these themes, compared to their '*importance*' level. One of the implications is that the six features could potentially be challenges to deal with in order to scale up the adoption of LA.

3.2 State of adoption – senior managers' perspectives

The interview data showed that 21 out of 51 institutions were already implementing centrally-supported learning analytics projects, 9 of which had reached institution-wide level, 7 partial-level (including pilot projects), and 5 were at the data exploration and cleaning stage. Meanwhile, 18 institutions were in preparation to roll out institutional learning analytics projects, and 12 did not have any concrete plans for an institutional learning analytics project yet.

The survey data revealed that 15 institutions had implemented learning analytics, of which 2 had reached full implementation and 13 were in small scale testing phases. Sixteen institutions were in preparation for learning analytics projects, and 15 were interested but had no concrete plans yet.

One of the implications of the two data sets is that there is high interest in LA among HEIs in Europe, but the maturity of adoption is low. The results of the student and staff focus groups and surveys are being analysed currently and will be included in the poster presentation at the conference.

3.3 Top challenges associated with ROMA components

Our mapping of the institutional interviews identified key themes of challenges associated with each of the six components of the ROMA framework. Among these, two top challenges are methods used to implement LA and issues around ethics and privacy.

4 CONCLUSION

The SHEILA project has reached out to nearly half of the European countries, and observed high interest in LA among HEIs. However, few HEIs have taken a systematic approach to LA with defined strategy and policy. Our preliminary findings have identified prominent challenges that need to be tackled through an overarching policy.

REFERENCES

Macfadyen, L. P., Dawson, S., Pardo, A., & Gašević, D. (2014). Embracing Big Data in Complex Educational Systems: The Learning Analytics Imperative and the Policy Challenge. *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 9, 17–28.